

AG Jennings' op-ed: A house divided

The following op-ed, written by Attorney General Kathy Jennings, was originally published in *The News Journal* and *Delaware State News*.

"We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose. *If we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves.*" – Abraham Lincoln, 1861

When he was sworn in, Abraham Lincoln faced the greatest crisis of any president yet or since: before he was inaugurated, seven states protested his election by seceding from the Union. Another four followed suit through the spring of 1861.

What followed was the bloodiest war in American history – one that Lincoln believed settled the question that popular government was no absurdity. Mercifully, he cannot see what's become of us today.

Lincoln, who led the Union to victory, wasn't alive to see seditionists, joined in common cause by neofascists, racists, and anti-Semites carry the Confederate battle flag through the U.S. Capitol. Lincoln, whose opponent in a bitter election said upon defeat that "partisan feeling must yield to patriotism," didn't have to witness our president's disgraceful refusal to honor our people's voice. Our first and greatest Republican president can't see some of his party's heirs at the vanguard of a campaign to divide the nation he saved.

Like millions of Americans, I've been consumed and conflicted

by the horror I felt watching the attack on our Capitol. I'm grateful that this traitorous assault failed and that Congress reconvened and did its job. But I'm angered by men like Sen. Josh Hawley, whose ambition is still too high to abandon the lies that terrified and enraged millions, killed five, and put hundreds at risk.

I'm proud of the heroism shown by officers like Brian Sicknick and Eugene Goodman, whose actions kept the insurrection from becoming a greater tragedy. But I'm concerned by the communication and leadership breakdowns that, beyond explanation, left law enforcement outgunned by a violent mob that nearly decapitated our government.

I'm moved by the patriotism and honesty of Republicans like Mitt Romney. But I'm appalled by the president's allies and media apparatus who feign shock after unleashing the beast they made – and who now, facing accountability, hypocritically call for unity after giving platform and safe quarter to the towering lies that loom over this disaster.

People of conscience in both parties worked together ahead of the election to educate voters, to protect their rights, and to prevent election fraud *regardless of who won*. President Trump offered us no support – indeed, his fabricated conspiracies, sabotage of the Postal Service, and winks to extremists made our jobs harder.

The election came and went, and again we worked with bipartisan partners to fight Trump's baseless legal challenges and face-saving disinformation campaigns. Despite a unison of judges (including Trump appointees) and Republican election officials who debunked and rejected his lies, he continued unabated – going as far as pressuring election officials to “find” votes, even as he accused others of fraud.

All the while, his allies in Washington, in the media, and even in our state chose fealty to a lost cause over loyalty to

their country. They continued to parrot lies that they did not believe, even as the mob breached the Capitol.

Nobody can be surprised that this happened. The time for shock passed when Klansmen and neo-Nazis marched on Charlottesville, when Michigan's capitol was stormed, and when the FBI foiled a militia's plot to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

The mob didn't just appear; it was incited. It was doused with lies, drenched in fear, and ignited by the president. Now, five people are dead. Dozens more are injured, including police who were beaten, crushed, dragged, maced, and killed. The insurrectionists' intent was clear: they brought tactical gear, zip-ties, improvised bombs, and guns. The attack was planned meticulously. Unless we act, it will happen again.

America can come back from this; we must, and we will. But we begin with the truth. I applaud the courage and patriotism of Republicans who have disavowed the president's lies and incitement, and who have called on everyone – regardless of party – to stay home from violent demonstrations before more people are hurt or killed. For the good of our country, their leaders – in our state and in our nation – should follow suit.

Lincoln spoke of a house divided. We're back in that house today – and we need both hands to repair it.